

# Achieving Results Well-Being

**Goal:** Help families and communities improve the well-being of children in out-of-home care



Micah came into care due to Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Autism, as well as a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder diagnosis and possible other neurological issues. On two separate occasions he fell out of windows of multistory buildings while still in the care of the birth parents.

Micah was unable to communicate due to his disabilities and would become frustrated, angry, and inconsolable, often harming himself in his frustration.

Micah was placed with foster mom, Debbie in December of 2000. Debbie sought training to help her learn to communicate with a child who was autistic and received Children's Administration funds to purchase a highly recommended book that had pictures in it for teaching an alternative method of communication. Debbie created laminated pictures based upon the book and began to use them with Micah in order to give him a form of communication. She enrolled Micah into an occupational therapy program and enlisted the therapist to implement the same communication system. Little by little, Micah began to associate pictures with words. He began to get the idea that by bringing a picture of what he wanted to Debbie and others, he could communicate those wants.

Debbie began with food words, since they were the strongest in reinforcing the learning. Now Micah asks for cereal or eggs or toast, in the mornings! The social worker was at the foster home for a health and safety visit when a well-known food delivery services man arrived. Micah recognized his yellow hat and yellow raincoat and ran into the kitchen and ran back to Debbie and while smiling and giggling, he handed her a picture of an ice cream sandwich. Micah knew that when he saw this man, there would soon be ice cream sandwiches to eat!

Everyday Debbie adds new picture "words" for Micah to learn. He has developed a vocabulary of more than 100 "words" and can communicate them. He has learned the difference between big and small, colors, foods, toys, clothing, etc. Because he can now communicate, Micah no longer acts out in frustration. He smiles and dances and hugs everyone in the household. Micah's strides are pretty great from a child who previously could not communicate at all with his world. Debbie was also instrumental in convincing Micah's new school to apply the same communication system. Instructors were reluctant but Debbie convinced Micah's therapist to attend the Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting and advocate for the use of the communication system, to which the school agreed.

Micah's social worker reported that at a 2003 IEP Meeting, the teachers maintained little hope that Micah would advance very much at all as they drafted his goals for the coming year. However, at the follow-up IEP meeting, all in attendance admitted that they were humbled by the realization that in just a few short weeks, Micah had completed all of the written goals and that they had to rewrite the IEP!

The determination of a caring foster parent and support of Children's Administration social workers to ensure the well-being of an incredibly resilient little boy resulted in achievements far beyond anyone's expectations.

## Well-Being

Providing for a child's life-sustaining needs is only the beginning of what constitutes adequate care. Children must also have access to community-based resources that address their educational, vocational, social and cultural needs as well.

The administration is committed to a number of well-being objectives included in the Strategic Plan, those objectives are available in the Strategic Plan Summary (Appendix D) on pages 60-61 of this report.

Lack of information system capacity as well as challenges related to the sharing of outcome data from one system to another make data collection, tracking and reporting difficult at best.

The Children's Administration continues pursuing new ways to measure and understand child well-being in the future, including but not limited to case record reviews, client satisfaction surveys, and focus groups with foster children.

### Well-being objectives presented in this report include:

- Increase worker visits with children
- Children in placement are supported in age-appropriate educational and developmental programs

Outcomes are tracked via handcount in an effort to determine how well children and youth are fairing in out-of-home placements. Currently CA is developing alternatives to input, track and report data related to Well-Being measures.

Handcounts regarding the following measures provide some information regarding child well-being while the administration works to improve information system capacity.

- Children who are visited quarterly by their social worker
- High School/General Equivalency Diploma (GED) or educational/vocational enrollment
- Youth in care who receive Independent Living Services (ILS)



## Well-Being

### Objective: Increase worker visits with children

Measured by: Children who are visited quarterly by their social worker

In order to adequately assess a child's well-being in out-of-home placement, that child must be visited and observed in the environment in which they live.

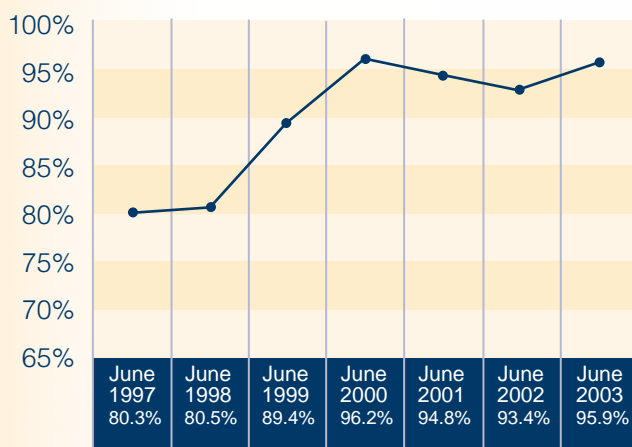
CA requires social workers to make face-to-face contact with children in the child's foster home at least once in each ninety-day period. The health and safety checks are designed to observe the child in their surroundings and assess the health and well-being of the child as well as interactions between the child and foster family.

Additional social worker contact with children in care often occurs at the local Children's Administration office, at appointments and hearings for children and youth and other settings as well.

Social workers are expected to make this quarterly contact with children in their placements in at least 95 percent of the cases involving children in out-of-home care. It is unlikely that performance for this measure will ever reach 100 percent due to children who run away and other unforeseen circumstances.

In fiscal year 2003, 95.6 percent of children were seen by their social workers in their homes quarterly.

**Social Worker Visits with Children in Foster Care\***



\*Handcount of the percent of children who have been in out-of-home placement for at least 90 days who are seen face-to-face by their social worker in the caregiver's home at least once during the quarter.





## Well-Being

## Objective: Children in placement are supported in age-appropriate educational and developmental programs

**Measured by:** High school/general equivalency diploma or educational/vocational enrollment

The Children's Administration recognizes that educational outcomes are often reflective of a child's well-being in out-of-home placement. In recent years, the administration has made increased efforts to track educational outcomes and factors impacting the educational success of young people in foster care.

In Calendar year 2002, 470 youth aged out of foster care. "Aging out" means they remained in foster care for a minimum of one year and had not been placed into a permanent home prior to exiting care, many of them were in guardianship placements at time of exit.

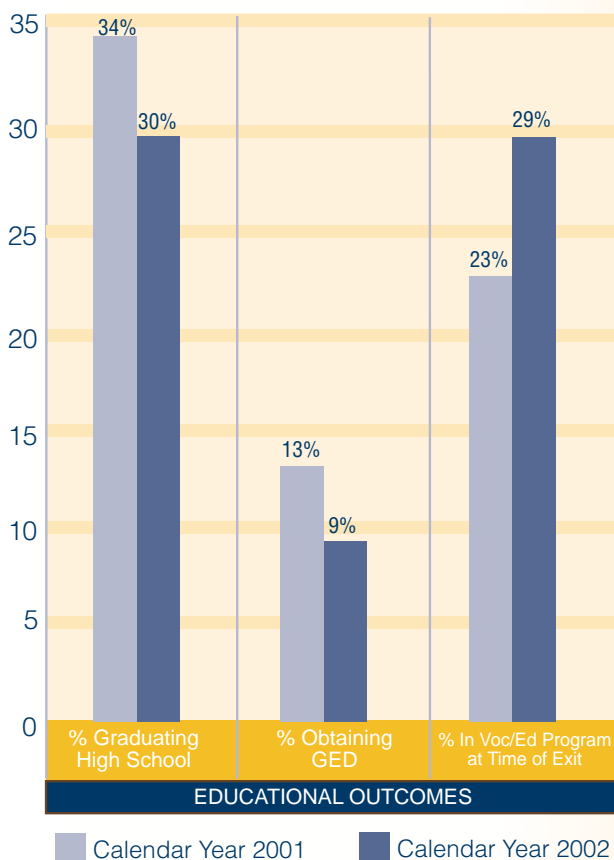
Of the 470 youth, 141 graduated from high school; 44 obtained a General Education Diplomas (GED); and 138 were enrolled in an educational or vocational program at time of exit.

All total, 323 youth or 69% demonstrated a positive educational outcome upon leaving the foster care system. Of the 323, 147 planned to pursue higher education. Only 14 of those youth who did not reach an educational goal while in foster care planned to pursue higher education.

As the administration examines factors impacting educational outcomes toward the goal of improving them, additional data is handcounted. Of the 147 youth who did not demonstrate a positive educational outcome, 84 of them or 57% had been enrolled in special education while in school. Of those who did graduate, obtain a GED or were enrolled in an educational or vocational program, 52% had also been enrolled in an Independent Living Program prior to exit.

The administration continues developing improved educational outcome data measures, tracking and reporting strategies toward improving practice and outcomes for youth.

**Youth Turning 18 in Foster Care Who Graduated From High School, Obtained a GED or Were Enrolled on an Educational or Vocational Program at Time of Exit\***



\*Handcount of youth who turn 18 and have no permanent plan completion or were in guardianship at the time of exit from foster care. A total of 69 youth or 12% were excluded from the statistics as no information was available regarding those youth following exit from care

### Do you know?

10. What the well-being objectives include?
11. How often social workers must visit with children in their out-of-home placements?
12. Which young people are eligible to receive Transitional Living Services?

Answers may be found on page 58 of this report.

## Well-Being



*An eighteen-year-old former foster child had been in care for several years. She and her four siblings were removed from their home during a midnight police raid of their parents home where Methamphetamine was being manufactured. In foster care, the teen was able to focus on her studies without the chaos that was ever-present in her home. With a support system of foster parents, professionals and friends, the resilient youngster maintained a 3.0 or higher GPA throughout school. She also attended an Independent Living Services (ILS) Program that helped her make the transition from foster care to living on her own. She said of the program, "they have taught me things like how to balance a check-book, what to do in emergencies ...I also learned a lot about boundaries with other people and healthy relationships." She went on to say that as a result of ILS she was confident moving out on her own saying, "...future goals in mind, I know I will succeed."*

### Objective: Children in placement are supported in age-appropriate educational and developmental programs

Measured by: Youth in care who receive Independent Living Services

Every year thousands of young adults "age out" of our nation's child welfare systems and become members of the greater community. About 300 of those youth are from Washington state.

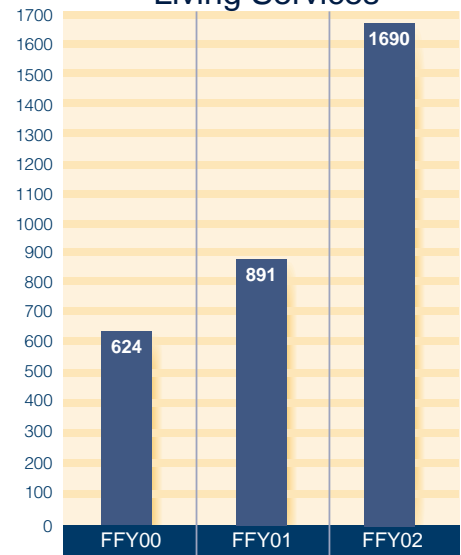
Their success or failure often hinges on the resources and support afforded them prior to and following their exit from the foster care system.

In 1999 the federal government passed the *Chafee Foster Care Independence Act* in an effort to help young adults avoid the homelessness, incarceration and unwanted pregnancy that often follows a life in foster care.

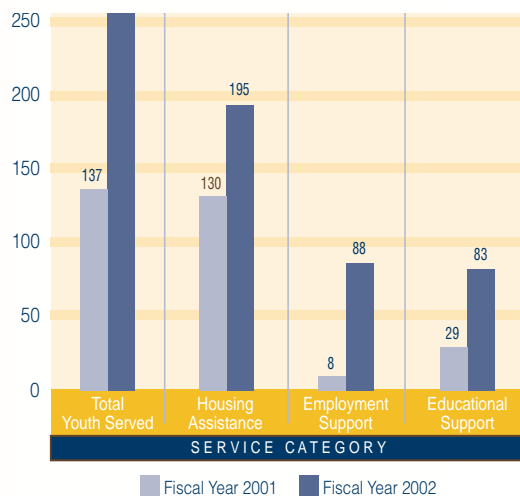
Through Chafee, states are able to receive additional funding to assist young people in the transition from foster care to independence through help with housing, education, employment and social services.

Since tracking began in federal fiscal year 2000, Independent Living Services in Washington state have increased dramatically. CA provided contracted services to 624, 16-18 year-old young adults in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2000 and that number increased to 1,690 in FFY 2002.

**Youth (Age 16-18) Served in Independent Living Services**



**Independent Living Transition Services Provided to Former Foster Youth (Ages 18-21)**



Youth served may have received services in more than one service category, thus the sum total of youth served in each category will exceed the sum of all youth served in the "Total" columns.